

STATEMENT

of

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on

HR23

Belated Thank You to the Merchant Mariners of World War II Act of 2007

House Committee on Veteran’s Affairs

April 18, 2007

Mr. Chairman and the House Veterans Affairs Committee members

My name is Herman Rosen, known as Hank. On April 29, 2007, I'll be 88 years old. I live in San Diego, California and I strongly encourage the passage of HR23 "A Belated Thank You to the Merchant Mariners of World War II Act of 2007".

On December 7, 1941, when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, I was a student at the University of Missouri and a member of ROTC Field Artillery. I expected to be drafted into the U. S. Army.

I had always wanted to go to sea. An advertisement in Popular Mechanics Magazine caught my attention. It was a photograph of a young man in a midshipmen's uniform. Beneath it read "America's new ships have the finest officers afloat. Anxious to get in and pitch for America? Here's the way to serve your Country now... Apply to the Merchant Marine Academy today!" I thought, why not, my chance to go to sea and help my country.

I applied, passed the requirements and in March 1942, was sworn in as a Cadet, U. S. Merchant Marine Cadet Corps., Midshipman, USNR and reported to the Academy at King's Point, New York.

After 3 months of preliminary training, I shipped out from Wilmington, NC on the newly launched S.S. John Drayton, a Liberty ship. We sailed to New York where we loaded Douglas A-20 bombers, Sherman tanks, ammunition, and assorted supplies for unknown recipients. We all assumed they were for Russia.

Due to horrendous Merchant Marine losses of ships and men on the North Atlantic, the S. S. John Drayton was routed from New York to Cuba through the Panama Canal to the Pacific Ocean, down the West coast of South America, across the Atlantic to

South Africa. In Durban, South Africa we joined a convoy which traveled through the Indian Ocean to the Arabian Sea and finally the Persian Gulf and Khorsamshar, Iran. It was a journey of 17,260 miles from October 11, 1942 to February 1, 1943. Our ship was finally unloaded and on April 1st, we were ordered to return to the States.

On a dark night on the Indian Ocean, 21 days later, with gale force winds blowing, the S. S. John Drayton was trapped and torpedoed by two Italian submarines some 300 miles east of Durban, South Africa.

I scrambled to a lifeboat, injuring my leg, and joined 23 other wet, frightened, injured, and oil-covered Merchant seamen and Navy gun crew. As was policy, my pay from the Merchant Marine ceased the minute I jumped into the lifeboat while the Navy gun crew continued on salary.

We spent 30-days adrift on the Indian Ocean without food and potable water, drinking salt water, urine and blood. Nineteen men died; 5 survived.

After 30 days in that lifeboat, we were picked up by a Greek vessel and taken to a military hospital in Durban. I weighed 97 pounds and suffered from exposure, malnutrition, dehydration, septic abrasions of the hands and feet, conjunctivitis in both eyes, shock and tachycardia, which has affected me since then.

After several months of hospitalization, during which time I continued unpaid, I returned to the Academy at Kings Point, graduated and was commissioned as Ensign, U.S. Naval Reserve. and licensed as 3rd Mate in the Merchant Marines.

I continued sailing throughout the War serving my country despite my experience. I was discharged by the Merchant Marine at war's end.

It is noteworthy that the Merchant Mariners in my lifeboat and in the hospital were not paid. The Navy gun crew were paid. In 1944, the G. I. Bill of Rights was passed but the Merchant Mariners received no Veterans' status or benefits. We received no G. I. Bill; no 52 weeks of \$20.00 per week; no V.A. loans; no Veterans health benefits; no family tax relief; no V. A. burial; no military transport; no generous life insurance; no mortgage interest deductions; even no USO access. YET we suffered the highest proportion of casualties of any branch of the Armed Services. More than 9,000 Merchant seamen died and more than 700 American Merchant ships were sunk.

It has been a long, hard battle for us to earn Veterans' status. I ask you today to rectify this wrong. Please support HR23, "The Belated Thank You to the Merchant Mariners of World War II".

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and the Committee members for listening to my testimony.